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ABSTRACT

Compiled after interviews with vocational educators at urban and rural joint vocational schools, comprehensive high schools, and career centers considered to be successful at marketing vocational education locally in Ohio, this handbook contains information on successful marketing activities that other local educators can undertake. Section I contains a composite list of the 25 activities considered most worthwhile by those interviewed. The activities appear under such headings as Targeting Community Leadership and In-School Activities. Section II (the largest section) describes activities currently being carried out in a cross-section of programs. Section III lists 22 themes and slogans around which marketing campaigns can be developed. Section IV describes eight new marketing strategies now being planned by those interviewed. Section V reports some findings of recent marketing evaluations through which administrators have been able to identify, among other things, factors that seem to have influenced adult awareness of the programs and the most influential persons leading students to enroll. Section VI lists the kind of marketing challenges to be faced in the 1990's, according to those interviewed. Section VII offers a summary of observations on the effectiveness of marketing strategies in vocational education. Fourteen recommendations are presented in Section VIII. (Author/CML)

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HANDBOOK ON

MARKETING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

OHIO COUNCIL ON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

1989

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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The Ohio Council on Vocational Education is an agency, separate from the State Board of Education, composed of thirteen concerned citizens representing business, labor, agriculture, education, and various groups with special needs. The Council is dedicated to the concept that vocational-technical education as well as academic education is necessary if Ohio is to be competitive in the national and global economies.

Ohio Council on Vocational Education—FY 89

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Foreword

Vocational educators have a message for Ohio students: You ought to give strong consideration to enrolling in a vocational program . . .

-- If you learn academic subjects better in active, hands-on, real-life situations;

-- If you intend to work part-time to help pay your way through college; or

-- If you want a bigger paycheck from a full-time job when you graduate from high school.

Getting this message across to students before they select the educational program they will pursue as 11th- and 12th-graders requires the astute application of professional marketing principles.

It is important that students make informed decisions about their educational plans. Individual lives are at stake. Human resources, which are the foundation of America's economy, are involved.

Marketing vocational education is serious business. That's why the Ohio Council on Vocational Education engaged William R. Martin, of Martin Communications, Worthington, Ohio, to conduct a study of "Marketing Vocational Education at the Local Level" and prepare this handbook.

It is a status report, in that it is a compilation of dozens of marketing strategies being employed today by Ohio's comprehensive high schools and joint vocational school districts. But it is much more than that.

Bill Martin's report looks to the future. It speculates on marketing challenges that hover on the horizon. And it concludes with a series of recommendations that warrant the attention of Ohio's vocational education community.

This report doesn't read like a book -- or an essay or newspaper story, for that matter. It is best read with a marking pen in hand to note those ideas that merit further consideration as vocational educators at the local level attempt to refine the many exemplary marketing initiatives they already are using.

Joseph L. Davis
Executive Director

Robert Y. Farrington
Chairperson

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Executive Summary

This handbook was compiled by researcher William R. Martin after he completed a series of interviews with vocational educators considered to have had successful experience in marketing vocational education locally in Ohio. Interviews were conducted with individuals in both urban and rural joint vocational schools, comprehensive high schools, and career centers.

This handbook lists 25 specific marketing activities that personnel generally viewed as most successful. These activities related to targeting community leadership, in-school activities, in-community activities, printed information, and news media.

This handbook includes brief descriptions of 80 marketing activities being conducted by one or more of the schools cited during the interviews. These activity descriptions are clustered under ten headings, such as "Gaining an Awareness Among Students and Parents" and "Working with the News Media." Included also is a listing of 22 themes and slogans that were being used in vocational outreach efforts.

New promotional projects in progress are described and a brief discussion of a very limited number of evaluations of local marketing strategies is included. Twelve marketing challenges looming on the horizon are included in the handbook.

A summary of 16 observations made in the course of the study and 14 recommendations for new marketing strategies to promote vocational education at the local level are also included.

I. Consensus on Success

What's Working?

This marketing handbook was developed through on-site interviews with vocational educators in comprehensive high schools, local school districts, and joint vocational schools located throughout Ohio.

All of those interviewed were asked to rank informally the most successful marketing and public information programs they have undertaken. The marketing activities listed below are arbitrarily clustered under five headings for convenience. No rank order of importance is intended for the headings used or the items listed under each heading. This is a composite list of programs that were viewed as most worthwhile:

Targeting Community Leadership

- Mailing of newsletters to specialized lists of community leaders.
- Tapping opportunities to promote vocational education among the large numbers of adults in continuing education classes.
- Communicating the success of work-site adult training programs designed to meet specific company needs.
- Encouraging citizen groups to use vocational facilities as meeting places.
- Sharing the positive experiences of top company executives who serve on advisory councils.
- Promoting seminars for small business owners.
- Conducting a district-wide meeting of all advisory council members, including a recognition dinner program.
- Presenting recognition and/or vocational awards to people outside the school family.

In-School Activities

- Intensive efforts to build pride among students and teachers.
- Integration of the joint vocational school course of study into the home high school student handbook.

- -- Upbeat video presentations featuring vocational alumni and students.
- — Eighth grade and sophomore visitations to high school vocational programs.
- — Visits of joint vocational teachers to home high schools.
- — Encouragement of students to wear jackets and patches associated with vocational student organizations.

In-Community Activities

- — Students scheduled for a full week in area business establishments for hands-on employment experiences.
- — Displays in regional shopping malls featuring students and equipment.
- — Provision of special services to community agencies.

Printed Information

- — Letter to all parents of eighth, ninth, or tenth grade students informing them of open house opportunities.
- — Special home mailings in November to parents of tenth grade students.
- — Preparation for target audiences of brochures that highlight specific programs.

News Media

- — Local observance of Vocational Education Week, especially those featuring graduates of vocational programs.
- — Access to community cable television programs.
- — Planned promotion of student recognition activities for each vocational program.
- — Frequent communication with weekly newspaper and small town newspaper editors to provide information on student achievements and awards.
- — Placement of advertisements on radio stations targeted to reach specific segments of the population.

II. Sharing of Marketing Activities

This section of the handbook describes marketing activities currently being carried out in a cross-section of vocational programs in rural and urban joint vocational school districts, comprehensive high schools, and career centers. These marketing activities are clustered under the following topical headings:

- Fostering an Awareness Among Students and Parents
- Staying in Touch with School Boards and Administrators
- Communicating with Teachers and Guidance Counselors
- Meeting Community Needs
- Tapping the Benefits of Advisory Councils and Resource Panels
- Promoting Student Activities and Achievement
- Establishing Linkages with Business Leaders
- Staying in Contact with Vocational Alumni
- Reaching People Through the Printed Word
- Working with the News Media

A. Fostering an Awareness Among Students and Parents

Educators are using more varied techniques in an attempt to draw a better picture for students and parents of vocational program offerings. More awareness programs are being geared to younger children in elementary and middle school with activities designed to review and reinforce information. Here are examples of some of the student-parent orientation programs:

VIDEO FEATURING GRADUATES. Interviews with vocational school graduates were featured in an unscripted video production. Graduates (all of whom were operators of their own businesses) were interviewed at their work place (retail outlets, construction sites, etc.) and while on service calls.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DEMONSTRATIONS. Career awareness programs were held in each elementary school. Table-top demonstrations were staged during each of the classroom visits.

SERIES OF VISITS. In one joint vocational district, a three-pronged visitation program has been developed. Vocational teachers visit home high school classrooms beginning at the seventh grade level. Ninth graders have a scheduled visit to the vocational center. Tenth graders spend one half day at the center.

CLUSTER TEAMS. A Freshman Road Show is offered for all ninth graders. Teachers and students are organized into subject area cluster teams that offer presentations on:

- construction trades
- public service opportunities
- business techniques
- high technology
- mechanical trades

EIGHTH GRADE VIDEO. A 20-minute video using testimonials of vocational students has been prepared for eighth graders.

COURSE OF STUDY BOOKLETS. The student handbooks for all home high schools were produced by the joint vocational school. The individual school course of study booklets were typeset (on desk-top publishing equipment) and printed at the vocational facility. The vocational class offerings were fully integrated into the individual high school handbooks.

CLASS DEFICIENCIES. Discussions were initiated with parents whose students near the age of 17 had eight or less credits of study. Career choices and educational opportunities were reviewed.

PRE-VISITATION NEWSLETTER. A newsletter is mailed to all parents of tenth graders just prior to the annual sophomore visitation program in the vocational center.

SOPHOMORE INFORMATION. An all-day program for tenth graders includes a video presentation and hands-on experiences with vocational class subjects. Follow-up activities include teacher visits and letters to the home.

IN THE SIXTH GRADE. Teams of students go to sixth grade classes to demonstrate learning activities available in the vocational program, such as: robotic arms and auto body work.

TELEMARKETING. A telephone marketing survey was initiated among students who had shown interest in vocational education but had not yet signed up. The telephone poll found that a significant percentage of undecided students wanted more information.

SUMMER ENRICHMENT. The Summer Youth Enrichment Program for K-12 students was featured in a four-page tabloid from the vocational school. It included course of study information for the two-week program held in June. Programs offered included:

- basic sketching
- animal care
- creative dramatics
- personal computer trouble shooting
- rocks and dinosaurs
- blueprint reading
- construction/electricity
- cheerleading

STUDENT NARRATORS. A video production featured four student narrators who explained their own experiences in vocational programs.

B. Staying in Touch with School Boards and Administrators

It is an on-going task to keep boards of education and school administrative personnel apprised of developments in the vocational program. Communicating is an especially important function for joint vocational schools which have a larger audience of administrators and board members. Here are some of the communication strategies that have been initiated:

BOARD APPEARANCES. Vocational graduates who run businesses are asked to make presentations to their home school board on the benefits of the vocational instructional program.

NEWS TAILORED FOR THE DISTRICT. A news story on the vocational program was prepared by the joint vocational school administrative office for use in each home district's annual report to citizens.

NEW PRINCIPAL ORIENTATION. The annual orientation program for newly employed school principals of home high schools is held in the vocational center.

HOST FOR BANQUETS. The vocational center is the annual site for some of the home high school student academic banquets held in the spring.

STATISTICAL BREAKOUT. The superintendent of each home high school received a report that noted which joint vocational students were enrolled in which vocational courses of study.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK. During Vocational Education Week, graduates are invited to speak with area school boards about their experiences in the vocational program. The presenters in one district included a:

- fire fighter
- company vice president
- retail manager
- law enforcement officer

BALLOT ISSUE SUMMARY. The campaign resource booklet for a joint vocational school levy contained a yearly history of local education tax issues on the ballot in home high school districts.

C. Communicating with Teachers and Guidance Counselors

Information sharing with teachers and guidance counselors takes on many forms. Here are a few programs in use:

FACULTY PARTICIPATION. Vocational teachers in a comprehensive high school regularly serve as advisors to student groups and classes, such as the yearbook staff, junior class, cheerleaders, etc.

ON-SITE EXPERIENCES. Two-person teacher and counselor teams take part in an on-site visitation day to the work place of companies that employ graduates. Typical visitations take place in: financial institutions, printing plants, a truck repair center,

government agencies, retail outlets, and research firms. A questionnaire is completed during the visit to help catalogue information such as:

- salary ranges of positions
- number of hirings per year
- employee participation in decision-making
- advancement opportunities
- availability of training

RECOGNITION. A recognition program to honor outstanding vocational teachers is conducted each year. Members of the district-wide advisory council screen the nomination forms and conduct interviews with finalists in making their selections.

SUMMER INSERVICE. Guidance counselors attend a college credit inservice program in the vocational center for two weeks during the summer.

STAFF PREFERENCES. A survey of the staff was conducted to determine what "school logo items" the staff would be interested in purchasing. The items most requested by the staff were:

- windbreaker jacket (number one by a wide margin)
- pens
- key chains
- long sleeve polo shirts
- umbrellas

HAND DELIVERY. Newly produced brochures on vocational program offerings are hand delivered by JVS supervisors to counselors in the home high schools, thus allowing an opportunity to discuss the programs and any changes.

NEW TEACHER MATERIAL. All new teachers in the district receive a specially-designed fact sheet on vocational class offerings.

D. Meeting Community Needs

One tenet of marketing is: "Find a need, then fill it." Vocational educators have identified community needs and then developed services to address those opportunities. Such activities have included:

IN-SCHOOL EMPLOYMENT OFFICE. The local Bureau of Employment Services (BES) office is located in the vocational center where telephone assistance and meeting space are provided. The set-up provides natural linkages between the education staff and employment specialists.

BOOKKEEPING HELP. A small-business tax seminar was sponsored by the vocational school to help explain the complexities of tax laws.

DURING THE DAY. Small-business-management programs are offered by the vocational school during the day to help attract participants. In addition, some adult education offerings are offered during the day to help meet the employment schedules of those on second and third shifts.

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE. As the agricultural community battled a long dry spell, the vocational school organized a "Drought Crisis Workshop." Seminar leaders included: county extension officials, federal government representatives, bankers, and mental health agency staff members.

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT NEEDS. Vocational education administrators organized an ad hoc discussion group of realtors and representatives from office management companies to determine needs in the field of property management. As a result of the discussion, it was determined that students needed training in areas such as: heating, ventilating & air conditioning; painting; decorating; custodial skills; and appliance repair. One company representative involved in the planning group pledged to employ the graduates from the property management program and to monitor progress of the students once on the job.

PROFITABLE. The "profit" theme has been used to promote business seminars offered through the vocational education program. Under a banner of "Build Your Profits in

1988," the brochure explained the seminar purposes, provided background on training leaders, listed fees, and described how to obtain Continuing Education Units. Program topics were:

- Building Positive Customer Relations
- Developing the Polish that Builds Profits
- Money-Making Marketing

FUND DRIVE HOST. A "thank you" breakfast for United Way campaign leaders was held in the vocational center food preparation area.

RETIREE GATHERINGS. The school cafeteria is opened for retiree association meetings.

SATURDAY ASSISTANCE. Cosmetology services are offered to the public on Saturdays.

SENIOR CITIZENS. A half-day program at a vocational center was scheduled to give senior citizens a first-hand look at student instructional activities. A luncheon was served for the 160 citizens who attended. The senior citizens:

- were given I.D. cards
- viewed student displays
- heard a presentation from the marketing class on consumer fraud
- took part in a question and answer session
- had opportunities for blood pressure checks
- were provided financial materials oriented to people on fixed incomes

MEETING PLACE. When the traditional meeting place for a civic group was closed, the vocational center was offered as a temporary meeting site.

E. Tapping the Benefits of Advisory Councils and Resource Panels

The important role played by effective advisory councils has prompted many school administrators to re-examine the structure of the councils. In some communities, advisory council activity has been thriving, with a waiting list of participants. In other places, advisory council work reportedly has become somewhat stale and revisions are now

under way to freshen the process. Other districts are finding additional avenues of counsel coming from ad hoc discussion groups. Here are approaches of working with advisory councils and resource panels:

STUDENT DISCUSSIONS. Former vocational students who have recently entered the work place are invited to an advisory council session for a sharing of experiences encountered in their day-to-day work environment.

LISTING. A handbook of all advisory council members is assembled each year listing each council, names of individuals, business telephone numbers, titles, and places of employment. All council members attend a district-wide appreciation dinner once a year.

ONE-TIME RESOURCE PANELS. To provide input into fast-changing fields of employment, small focus groups have been assembled. These focus groups, comprised of specialists from the community who have particular insights into employment trends, are invited to assist in areas such as: plastics, machine trades, and auto mechanics.

DISCUSSION CIRCLES. Segments of the community are selected for a meeting with school representatives to discuss broad-based district needs. Separate discussion circles are set up for people such as:

- bankers
- clergy members
- plant managers
- personnel directors
- real estate agents

AGENDA PLANNING. Leaders of advisory council teams are given guidance and encouragement on the importance of a pre-session agenda. Team leaders are advised to mail out the agenda several days before the scheduled date of the session.

PROCESS TIPS. Teachers are provided tips on how to foster the work of small groups of adults in an interactive atmosphere. Administrators provide ways to help instructors feel good about the process of seeking input from specialists. Some sessions are held during the day, with teachers given released time to plan and participate in the council session.

SUPERVISORS PARTICIPATE. Vocational supervisors in one district meet with at least four advisory councils per year to encourage, revitalize, and applaud the work of the members.

F. Promoting Student Activities and Achievement

A driving force of any promotional plan for public education is the systematic dissemination of student achievement news. The community relations component of a marketing program also focuses on enhancement of student pride. Promotional activities have included these examples:

COMMUNICATION COMMITTEES. Joint vocational school student task forces -- called Communication Committees -- have met with home high school principals on a regular basis during the year. Photos and names of committee members were publicized. The joint vocational school administration met with all of the Communication Committees in a joint session to discuss ways of fostering student involvement.

DESIGN INPUT. Students helped select colors and the design of a T-shirt that portrayed the vocational school theme for the year. Funds from vending machines helped pay for the T-shirts.

ENDOWMENT FUND. Student participation in leadership activities, such as attendance at national conferences, is financed through an endowment fund. The names of donors are listed on a plaque in the school. Donations come from sources such as:

- garden clubs
- real estate firms
- civic organizations
- educators
- memorial gifts
- property management companies

ELECTRONIC DISPLAY BOARD. A digital display board in the student commons area of the joint vocational school building flashes messages of activities taking place at home high schools. The sign's messages are programmed on classroom personal computers by marketing students.

GRADUATE GUARANTEE. A "Warranty Program" certificate has been distributed to prospective employers of vocational students spelling out how graduates are placed and what the school will do in the event the employee fails to perform satisfactorily. The school offers to retrain the graduate at no cost if, in the first year of work, the employee fails to perform satisfactorily in any of the guaranteed competency areas.

PARENT INVITATION. When a student recognition program is planned for a board of education meeting, parents of the pupil are invited to attend the meeting.

STUDENT TEACHER. A feature story on a vocational school graduate -- who was completing a student teaching assignment in the area -- was carried in the community newsletter published by the vocational district.

BANNERS. Student-made banners were hung from the walls of a joint vocational school cafeteria to show the names and colors of the home high schools.

MALL DISPLAY. During Thursday and Friday of Vocational Education Week, student accomplishments and activities were on display at a large regional mall. The displays included:

- refurbished automobile
- child care training
- scale model of a house

CARPENTRY PROJECT. Carpentry class members sent invitations to their parents to tour a student-built residence. The date for the open house was strategically set for Mother's Day.

IN THE OFFICES. A Senior Business Work Week is scheduled to give students hands-on experiences in office settings. They perform such work as typing letters for chief executive officers.

G. Establishing Linkages with Business and Labor Leaders

Leaders within the business and labor community can become active partners in helping to develop the vocational education program, but educators have found that the contact must be initiated by school representatives. Educators also have learned that it often takes months to develop a close relationship with business and labor executives. Promotional programs that link the schools with business and labor leaders include:

MAILINGS TO BUSINESS AND LABOR GROUPS. Trade and professional groups constitute part of the mailing list of a vocational school newsletter to the business community. The mailing list is developed by contacting leaders of organizations such as the:

- area auto dealers association
- printing trades council
- building contractors association

RESOURCE PEOPLE. Small business owners -- selected from the Chamber of Commerce membership list — have served as resource people for job market seminars sponsored by the vocational school.

MEETING PLACE. The vocational center is used as the meeting place for groups such as the fleet council of truck company owners, welding union, and printing trades council.

THANK YOU FOR SERVING. An appreciation meal was held for all advisory council members, who were given a student-made gift as a memento for service on the council. A member of the Council drew upon his company's surplus inventory in donating materials for the gift.

NEWSLETTER MAILINGS. The vocational school newsletter in one district is sent to a wide variety of contacts within the community, including:

- medical waiting rooms
- corporate offices
- area school administrators and counselors
- public office holders
- advisory council members

- county government departmental officials
- manufacturers association
- newly named corporate leaders
- all visitors to the school facility

TRADE SHOW. An industrial trade show was sponsored by the vocational school for area manufacturing firms to display their products to the general public.

H. Staying in Contact with Vocational Alumni

The work force now has a large number of graduates of vocational education programs. Alumni of vocational programs have assumed managerial posts, have formed companies, and have filled high-skill job assignments. Examples of initiatives educators have taken in order to stay in touch with alumni include:

ANNUAL REPORT FEATURE. Twenty-seven individuals who had graduated from a vocational program in recent years were featured in the district's annual report.

AWARD. A Distinguished Alumni Award is presented at the vocational school open house program each year.

SHARED LEARNING. Entrepreneurs from the vocational program were invited to serve as resource panelists for student programs and for teacher inservice classes.

HONOR. A Small Business Award is presented each year to a graduate of the vocational program.

REGISTRATION. Names of vocational alumni were secured through providing a sign-up sheet at the registration table at an open house.

HALL OF FAME. Three honorees are inducted each year into the district's Vocational Hall of Fame. Honorees are selected by the general vocational advisory council. Nominees must have completed one decade of work experience before being considered.

I. Reaching People through the Printed Word

While video productions have become the most popular new method for communicating vocational school messages, printed materials remain a basic part of most vocational education marketing programs. Printed word techniques have included:

STUDENT CLUB LOGOS. The logos of all youth activity clubs are listed in a box in the general program brochure provided to parents and students. In other cases, a summary of the youth organizations is included in the appropriate specific subject area brochure. For example, a story and logo for Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA) is mentioned in a brochure on Auto Mechanics Technology.

ALL PROGRAMS. The back side of each specific instructional program brochure contains a summary of all areas of study offered in the vocational program.

ACHIEVEMENTS. A list of "exceptional student award winners" and "outstanding students" by subject area was presented on page one of the vocational school's annual report.

CALENDAR. Important dates were printed inside daily blocks of a monthly calendar produced by the vocational school. It was spiral bound with one page devoted to each month.

LOGO IN DIFFERENT SIZES. A "repro sheet" of vocational school logos was developed with the same art work printed in different sizes.

BUSINESS RESOURCES. Employee training programs were highlighted in a Business and Industries Resources booklet. The publication included a list of the kinds of programs that were specially developed to meet employee needs. Endorsements from supervisors who helped develop the on-site training modules were printed. Thank you notes from executives of companies that utilized vocational facilities for on-campus training of workers were also featured.

HONORS HIGHLIGHTED: A four-page publication covering student honors included a list of names and photographs. Attention was given to:

- outstanding students in each program
- scholarships awarded

- students with perfect attendance records
- award-winning projects in vocational youth club competitions

STUDENT WORK NOTED. Credit was given to the commercial art students who designed, type-set, and produced one of the community information brochures distributed by the vocational school.

J. Working with the News Media

Vocational educators have found that news media personnel must be cultivated and kept posted on school activities. Some of the news media strategies have included:

BRIEFING. Vocational administrators have initiated an individualized briefing for the newspaper reporter who was assigned to cover education news. The session included a discussion on how to maintain contact through the year as news stories develop.

YEARLY PLAN. Vocational programs are plotted on a yearly calendar to provide a visual picture of which events would have potential for news media coverage.

RADIO CAMPAIGN. An advertising campaign on radio stations in the area featured different spots based on listenership patterns of the stations. A station that reached a large number of students, for example, was provided with a series of spots aimed at the interests of school-age listeners. Adult-oriented stations were given spots featuring parent testimonials.

NEW EQUIPMENT. When new classroom equipment is obtained, information is automatically channeled to the news media. Assistance is provided in securing photographs or television coverage of the equipment being used by students.

CABLE TV. Regular communications with a community cable TV station led to extensive production assistance when the vocational school developed a 20-minute video presentation.

III. Themes and Slogans

Themes and slogans are often used as idea starters for developing campaigns, targeted messages, student programs, and videos and brochures. Here is a list of some of the themes and slogans being used in vocational outreach efforts:

- Your Future Starts Today
- Keeping Our Area Working
- Aim for Success
- I Love It Here . . . I'm Somebody!

- Prepare for a Career In . . .
- Where Winners Get Their Start
- Vocational Education . . . the Competitive Edge
- Preparing the Future Work Force

- There's a Place for You
- Planning for Job Success
- A Salable Skill for Every Graduate
- Vocational Education: Build on Success

- Your Opportunity Center
- Learn a Living
- The Choice Belongs to You
- Ahead to the Future

- The Best of Both Worlds
- Excel in Entrepreneurial Spirit
- Where Tomorrow's Career Begins
- Share the Excitement

- Developing Skills Today for a Better Life Tomorrow
- Education for Lifelong Learning

IV. New Promotion Projects in Progress

A number of new marketing strategies are being planned by vocational staffs. Some projects are in the early stages of implementation and have not been in existence long enough to be evaluated. Others are in the final phases of preparation and await implementation. Here is a sampling of promotional projects now in the works:

NEWS MEDIA LUNCHEON. A luncheon for news media representatives is being planned to coincide with an open house program.

COORDINATION OF CONTACTS. Faced with the problem of multiple contacts from school system representatives seeking job information from the same employers, one district is planning to assemble a Computer Job Bank to coordinate calls to businesses.

STUDENT RECOGNITION. A student of-the-month recognition program is being considered to honor achievement, citizenship, work traits, and school contribution.

ON-SITE MEETING. School guidance counselors will be invited to a luncheon at the vocational school for an in-depth sharing of information on student career choices and post high school educational opportunities.

NEWS MEDIA CONTACT. To help vocational staff better relate to news media personnel, a training session is being planned on how to prepare news releases. In addition, a news media luncheon is being scheduled that will provide updated information on vocational offerings for reporters who cover the schools.

NEWSLETTER START-UP. The complete list of adult education training programs is being prepared for the inaugural edition of a newsletter aimed at area business establishments and all vocational advisory committee members. Included in the newsletter will be a summary of short-term business seminars offered during the year.

INFORMATION TO BOARD MEMBERS. A twice-a-year-newsletter from a joint vocational school district is being developed for board members from participating school districts. Separate editions will be prepared for each school district.

VIDEO. A joint vocational school video presentation in the planning stage is targeted for showing at local board of education meetings.

V. Evaluations of Local Marketing Strategies

There is limited local data on how school marketing plans affect student enrollment decisions. Marketing surveys are few in number. School administrators admit they rely mostly on personal reactions and informal critiques of the promotional plans. Glimpses of some of the findings of recent marketing evaluations are provided through the rank order listing of influential factors under each of the five headings below:

ADULT AWARENESS. Understanding of adult educational opportunities in one district was traced to:

- word-of-mouth communications
- distribution of fliers
- radio spots

INFLUENTIAL INDIVIDUALS. The most influential persons leading students to enroll in a vocational program were the following:

- mother
- father
- friend
- counselor
- vocational students
- brother/sister

INFLUENTIAL EVENTS. The most influential events affecting student decision-making about vocational school enrollment were:

- parent discussion
- tour of facility
- booklet on course selection
- presentations to tenth graders
- open house

SIGNIFICANT FACTORS. A study of sophomores found that most of them knew before the tenth grade that they would be attending the vocational school. The most significant factors, the study showed, were:

- visitation days
- student conversations
- parent discussions
- information from school counselors
- presentations by student panels
- open houses

REASONS FOR ENROLLMENT. A questionnaire distributed among students found the main reasons they opted for a vocational program were:

- wanted to work after completing high school
- availability of courses
- family members attended the program
- friends attended vocational school
- parent wanted students to enroll
- recommendations of counselors

VI. On the Marketing Horizon: New Challenges

Vocational educators offer the following preview of the kinds of marketing challenges and communication strategies they expect to encounter in the 1990s:

COUNSELOR INFORMATION. Give more attention to the information needs of seventh and eighth grade counselors, including new directions in career planning for middle and junior high youngsters.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. Stretch communication efforts into the elementary grades, including expansion of parental information about instructional choices.

SPECIFIC PUBLICATIONS. Channel new funds into preparation of materials that focus on more specific course of study topics (vs. general information publications).

PEOPLE SKILLS. Expand instructional programs that emphasize "people skills" and the ability to communicate in the work place.

PROMOTION OF KEYBOARD TRAINING: Increase information flow to students and parents on the need for all students to possess keyboard skills as computerized data entry becomes commonplace in nearly all trades.

CIVIC GROUPS. Seek more contact with established civic groups and organizations that have an interest in knowing more about vocational education.

REVISED STANDARDS. Initiate periodic assessment of how well school personnel are coping with changes in academic standards for graduation and post high school experiences.

PAROCHIAL SCHOOL AUDIENCE. Re-examine communication strategies that reach the interests of parochial school parents and administrators.

MEDICAL AND CARE FOR THE ELDERLY. Expand contacts with members of the medical community as job opportunities emerge, especially in the field of care for the elderly.

MEASUREMENTS. Initiate periodic studies to determine how vocational education is measuring up to employer demands in areas such as: verbal skills, keyboard computer entry for various job categories, customer relations, and reading comprehension.

ENTRY LEVEL COUNSEL. Provide initial employment assistance to students including: mock interview sessions, telephone skills, attendance patterns, appropriate dress, demeanor, and demonstrable work ethic.

REAL ESTATE AGENT CONTACTS. Expand efforts to build communication links with real estate personnel who stand to profit from knowing more about vocational offerings for children of prospective home buyers.

VII. A Summary of Observations

The Ohio Council on Vocational Education's four-month study that led to the development of this handbook has generated a series of findings and conclusions based on interviews, survey data, and examination of local marketing efforts. Observations on the effectiveness of marketing strategies in vocational education include:

RESEARCH. Evaluative data on the effectiveness of marketing programs on student enrollment or public perceptions at the local level is very limited. Little research has been done within school districts to measure the impact of public information programs and promotional strategies. The few studies that have been completed on the subject are widely quoted.

PROMOTERS. Some of the best "sales people" for vocational education are entrepreneurs. In district after district, entrepreneurs have been willing to serve as resource specialists and to offer endorsements on the quality of the education they received. Especially helpful are graduates of vocational programs who have operated successful business ventures in the community.

ALUMNI. Formation of alumni clubs of vocational graduates has been a slow process, but it is a concept that vocational educators believe has some promise — if an appropriate communications forum with graduates can be established.

ADVISORY GROUPS. From district to district, the well-being of vocational advisory councils is a source of renewed interest among administrative personnel. Council activity may flourish or flounder within the same vocational district depending on the skill and motivation of the staff liaisons to the councils.

LEADERSHIP. A key ingredient in the workings of a productive vocational advisory council is the active participation of recognized leaders of the business community. The clout of an influential executive on a committee adds a sense of importance to the work of the group.

INITIATIVE. Top corporate executives will seldom initiate contact with vocational school administrators. But, CEO's will often respond favorably to requests for their input when asked on an individual basis — even through "cold calls."

PARTICIPATION. More vocational personnel are being encouraged to join and/or attend business groups that function in the community. Such groups typically include chambers of commerce, manufacturing councils, industrial marketing groups, economic growth task forces, and job training coalitions. No longer is participation in such groups being limited to a select few in a school district's central administration; participation is being spread among several educators.

COVERAGE. News media coverage of vocational education, especially in newspapers, varies widely from area to area. In some locations, editors are eager to print stories about student achievement, but in other geographic areas, the same type of story is ignored by media management.

IN TOUCH. Informal contact by vocational education representatives with news media personnel, such as personal delivery of news releases, produces big dividends in placement of positive stories.

NEWS STORIES. One of the frustrations of administrative personnel is the short-lived interest among faculty members in being vigilant for classroom activities that would be newsworthy material for radio, television, or newspapers. Even after a training seminar for employees on media relations, the interest often wanes when the initial contact with a news media outlet does not produce satisfactory coverage.

BROADCAST ADS. A radio advertising campaign must be repetitious for the message to make a dent in citizen understanding.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY. School district levy campaign planners infrequently utilize vocational education in the campaign message. It is also a rare occurrence when campaign strategists purposely seek out vocational personnel for input into the campaign.

VOTER BEHAVIOR. Joint vocational school administrators find it difficult to conduct vote-changing campaigns where pockets of voters have consistently voted against school issues. Likewise, the strategies of previous campaigns are hard to evaluate due to the impersonal nature of most joint vocational school ballot efforts since voters are spread among several school communities.

RESIDENTIAL MAILINGS. Many vocational education administrators are beginning to re-examine the cost effectiveness of mass mailings to households.

IN-HOUSE DESIGN. Vocational personnel cite the amount of effort required to design brochures in-house as one of the most troublesome tasks that drain time away from educational duties. They mention lack of expertise in graphic arts and inadequate staff resources as the main reasons for the long hours of work in preparation of publications. Administrators who are untrained in publication design skills indicate a desire for professional assistance in layout techniques, art work preparation, and critiques of the finished product.

FACTS AND FIGURES. Vocational personnel vigorously consume statistics, facts, quotations, and research work on vocational education. Especially helpful are charts and tables that can be inserted into publications or used to enhance visual and verbal presentations.

VIII. Recommendations

The following suggestions and ideas for new marketing strategies are offered by the researcher based upon findings, conclusions, and insights obtained in the course of the study:

1. Gather student input on brochure effectiveness. Set up a discussion group of students who were the original target of a publication before redesigning the brochure. Ask students to share what they read, what they did not read, and how the publication could be improved. Consider doing the same thing with parents of eleventh grade students.

2. Run a dual track marketing survey. Identify a sampling of vocational graduates within the last five years. Poll the group on the most important things that were gained by being part of a vocational course of study. Conduct a comparable survey among parents. Pay careful attention to the views of parents who had more than one child in the program. Compile the most often cited sources of satisfaction with the program from the student and parent perspective. Prepare an outline of the results for use in communication vehicles such as:

   - speeches
   - video presentations
   - student awareness programs
   - parental letters
   - corporate outreach efforts

3. Conduct a mini research project on student choice patterns. Select three vocational subject area programs where student enrollment is consistently high. Determine through a mini research project how the programs were promoted and what influenced the students to enroll in the courses of study.

4. Verify the informational needs of guidance counselors. Obtain through a questionnaire or a discussion group the most important informational needs of counselors as they work with students and parents in educational and career

decisions. Analyze differences between the needs of middle school/junior high school and senior high school counselors. Ask questions such as:

- What questions about vocational education do students ask most often?
- What kind of materials would be most helpful?
- Which vocational programs merit more specific information?
- How should changes in the content of the programs be communicated?

5. Learn from professional photographers. Observe how photographers stage news pictures of workers and equipment for the news media. Note how skillful camera operators strive for natural poses of the people in the photos. Make mental notes on the kind of photos being published in newspapers.

6. Feature some smiling faces. Include photographs of pupils who are smiling and looking at the camera when choosing illustrations that will be used in promotional brochures. Reduce the tendency to feature a series of grim-faced students.

7. Build a placement list. Compile a list of businesses and organizations where graduates from one class (or a series of classes) are employed. Group by job category, such as public service, health care, manufacturing, etc. Point out that the list is only a sampling of employment placements. Make multiple use of the information by sending it to a variety of places, including:

- news media editors
- chambers of commerce
- community economic development groups
- legislators
- school board members
- personnel directors
- levy campaign planners
- employment services staff
- public officials
- trade unions
- labor councils
- school staff
- students in grades 8, 9, and 10, and their parents

8. Extend coverage to the business and labor world. Develop a standard news release format that can be used when sending information to the editors of professional association and business publications concerning the involvement of people in advisory councils. When advisory council members are photographed for their involvement in vocational functions, for example, send a copy of the photo and a short news release to the appropriate trade or business publications. Collect information from the council members on an annual basis to facilitate the mailing of news releases to the correct organizations and to the appropriate business and labor publications.

9. Note student assistance in publications. Print words of credit for student involvement in design and production of a community brochure. Consider a news release to the media on the experience gained by students doing "live" production work. Send copies of the brochure to parents with a letter. Do comparable promotional work for other student-produced projects.

10. Learn about radio audiences. Make an inquiry about the audience of a radio station before placement of advertising spots. If the information is not available from station personnel, make informal inquiries among students, faculty, and staff concerning the radio listening habits of area residents.

11. Explore cable television cooperative projects. Pursue personal contact with operators of cable television outlets. Inquire about program opportunities and how the station could assist in production of video projects.

12. Offer campaign assistance. Initiate early contact with school levy campaigners as the ballot issue strategy is shaped. Offer suggestions on how positive experiences with the business community can be utilized during the campaign. Provide documentation on placement percentages for vocational graduates. Help locate citizens and company representatives that have benefited from adult education classes sponsored by the vocational program.

13. Compile a list of harmonious objectives. Select four to six objectives of the vocational programs that correspond to "bottom line" interests of the business community. Develop a marketing strategy to communicate how the vocational program has focused on objectives which parallel the operation of well-managed

businesses and how students have been taught good work habits. The list might include:

- student body attendance percentages
- striving for a drug-free school environment
- understanding of disciplinary policies
- promotion of a positive and consistent work ethic
- respect for property
- importance of team work in job functions
- students' familiarity with the impact of computers and word processors
- emphasis on cost-effective use of supplies

14. Assemble a fact sheet on "productivity." Develop a fact sheet that lists 10 key points about the "productivity" of the vocational program in meeting business and students needs. Send to chief executive officers and plant managers of area business firms.

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